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ABSTRACT

This presentation discusses community college transfer and the Cerritos College (California) President's Emphasis on Transfer (PET) Task Force, a project committed to making Cerritos College a transfer-oriented institution. Among the goals PET has accomplished are: (1) creating the Scholars Honors Program, which sent three of its first six participants to major universities with $40,000 scholarships; (2) thinking of ways to remove the dichotomy between transfer requirements and A.A. degree requirements, and encouraging students who want to transfer to consider earning an A.A. along the way; (3) designing a new, "common sense" course-numbering system to clarify requirements; (4) implementing the Transfer Awareness Week each October, when students are beginning the transfer application process; (5) enacting special articulation agreements beyond the California public institutions, including pacts with a number of historically Black institutions, and Biola University, a fundamentally Christian college where over 50 Cerritos College students are enrolled; and (6) offering faculty-led Best Teaching Practices workshops on such topics as technology, learning communities, and transfer preparation. Since PET was instituted in 1996, transfers to the University of California have increased 20%, and transfers to California State University increased 11%, from 1994-95. The transfer rate, at least among one cohort followed from 1994 to 1997, has risen from 13 to 19%. The article concludes with recommendations on facilitating transfer. Appended are a statement of vision and regional transfer compact. (EMH)

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Presentation

of

Dr. Fred Gaskin
President/Superintendent

Cerritos College
Norwalk, California

to

The Little Hoover Commission

March 25, 1999

Subject: Community College Transfer

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Good morning ladies and gentlemen. My thanks to you Mr. Chairman and the members of the Commission for giving me the opportunity to share some thoughts with you about transfer of community college students to the university. A special hello to Assemblymember Havice who is a Professor of English at Cerritos College on leave to serve in the Assembly.

I'm Fred Gaskin, the President/Superintendent of Cerritos College. Cerritos College is a campus of approximately 22,000 very diverse students. In the current semester, spring 1999, 44% of them are Hispanic, 9.5% Asian, 7.5% African-American, 3.8% Filipino and just over 1% Native American. Nearly 43% are over the age of 25. Over 21% are immigrants or international students. A majority are the first in their family to attend college, and for a significant number, English is a second language. Our district, in southeast Los Angeles County includes the cities of Artesia, Bellflower, Cerritos, Downey, Hawaiian Gardens, Norwalk, La Mirada and parts of several other cities. Our remarkably diverse student body comes from more than 75 high schools of origin and from nearly 30 different Southern California communities. Those high schools include Whitney High School in the City of Cerritos, arguably one of the finest academic high schools in the state. At the other extreme, we have high schools where graduation rates, standardized test scores and college going rates are far below the state averages. These schools are not separated by great distance from Whitney High School. Rather, a five-minute ride can get you from one to the

other. And if you want to know what difference the elimination of attendance boundaries has made, you should know that 60% of our student body comes from outside the political boundaries of the district, and that five of the ten cities and six of the ten high schools which send the largest numbers of students to Cerritos College are similarly outside of what is the college district. When asked why they drive some considerable extra distance, or take fairly complicated public transportation to get to Cerritos College, students tell us that it's because Cerritos College represents a "step up," that it's a place that will give them opportunity, a place that will help them to achieve their goals.

For approximately 60% of them, that goal — as indicated on their application for admission — includes transfer to the university. And that is what really brings me here today — 60% of our students who want to transfer on to a university. Over the years Cerritos College has been known for many things. We've always been thought of as a student-centered institution and a place to get a good solid education. But our "reputation," if you will, came from our career programs, from our renowned student leadership and student activities programs, from outstanding athletic teams and, most importantly, a dedicated faculty. We were not seen as a transfer institution and, in fact, our transfer rates were low. That seemed unacceptable to me as the president of an institution where 60% of the students declare transfer as a goal. We needed, as an institution, to change our image. To change our image we needed both to change our institutional culture

and to take some concrete steps to make transfer a more viable option for our students. In the time that remains to me, I want to share with you some of the specifics of what we have done and what we are currently doing.

I first paid a number of visits to Professor Arthur Cohen of UCLA. Professor Cohen has dedicated a distinguished career studying and researching the topic of transfer from the community college to the university. He shared with me many strategies and many anecdotes. What struck me hardest but didn't deter me were his frequent comments that the transfer rate can be improved but the process is slow and the gains will be incremental.

Starting in 1993 Professor Cohen and his colleagues identified seven community colleges considered to be high transfer rate institutions and seven community colleges considered to be low transfer rate institutions. They then studied these institutions to identify the characteristics of the administration, faculty and students of high transfer rate institutions. Likewise, they did the same for low transfer rate institutions. The result of this research was the creation of benchmark characteristics which can be applied to other institutions. Some examples of the characteristics of those associated with high transfer rate colleges include a general culture or "ethos" of transfer, and a high level of involvement of faculty and administration in the transfer function. These institutions believe that they are preparing students for transfer and act

accordingly. Strong and effective articulation agreements are also present and the institution is academically oriented. Some characteristics of low transfer institutions include a poorly articulated general education curriculum, and a sense among staff that transfer is not a priority. Further, in some cases the curriculum seems unrelated to transfer. Low transfer rate institutions do not have effective advising systems, have faculty who know little about transfer, and do not approach transfer in a concerted fashion; in fact the institution often lacks any transfer "agenda" at all. There is often confusion about the college's intentions and all of the college's functions are seen as essentially equal. Transfer is just one of many options.

We utilized the instrument at Cerritos College with a stunning result. Our faculty and administration demonstrated the characteristics of those associated with low transfer rate institutions; our students, most surprisingly, demonstrated the attitudes of those associated with high transfer rate institutions. Clearly, we had a mandate – actually a cry – from our students to assist them to achieve their goal of a baccalaureate degree.

In the fall of 1995 I appointed a college wide task force on transfer. This task force quickly became known as the President's Emphasis on Transfer project, the PET Project for short. College presidents are often accused of having all sorts of pet projects. Some are true; some are campus myths. But in this case I was

happy and remain happy to have it called my PET project because it was and it is. This group has been a great success and the reason is simple. It is made up of the very best members of our faculty and they drive its agenda. Faculty are the key to transfer. As administrators we create an environment where transfer is very important. The faculty know that if they want to do something to enhance transfer, they will get and do get unconditional support. I say to them: "Let me be the one to say no." If you have any idea that will enhance transfer – bring it forward. Don't assume I won't support it. I have not yet denied testing an idea!

The faculty have accomplished some remarkable things, some of which are substantive and some of which are symbolic. All, however, are very important toward making Cerritos College a transfer oriented institution. Here are some examples:

The Scholars Honors Program

Our college has never had an Honors Program, though not for lack of trying. There have been numerous abortive attempts over the years. The PET Task Force thought it was crucial to have such a program. They knew that it would enhance transfer and create additional opportunities for our students, so they set about to create a program. From the time the PET subcommittee had its first meeting to discuss the program to the day the first students were enrolled for

honors credit in the Scholars' Honors Program (SHP) was less then one calendar year. Our first group—a small group of only six to be sure—of SHP students graduated last May. Three of those six took $40,000 in scholarships with them to major universities. SHP is making a difference. The transfer alliance with UCLA, of which our SHP is a member, to cite just one example, makes additional transfer spaces available to community college honors program graduates. Fully 95% of community college honors program graduates who apply for admission to UCLA for transfer are accepted and enter as juniors. And at UC, Davis all of the students who apply for admission under their transfer compact are accepted. There are numerous other examples, as well.

A.A. Degree vs. Transfer Requirements

As you probably know, here in California the requirements for the A.A. degree and the requirements for transfer are not the same. Many transfer students do not bother to earn an A.A. degree because what they really need is their 60 transfer units and the certification of their 39-unit general education core. Our commencement recognizes only those who have earned degrees and certificates. On the recommendation of the PET Task Force, we have undertaken some new year-end activity. We send a letter and a certificate of transfer to those students who are transferring but who have not earned an A.A. degree and are not participating in commencement. And for those who have earned degrees and are at the commencement exercises, we now read the name of the institution to

which they are transferring as they cross the stage and receive their diploma. These are symbolic gestures to be sure, but they send an important message. And by the way, one of the things that I think we need to consider across the state—and I know this is an issue for Chancellor Reed, as well—is the creation of a transfer A.A. degree, so that we can remove that dichotomy and encourage more students to earn the A.A. degree as part of their transfer preparation.

"Common Sense" Course Numbering

In the early days of the PET Task Force we went and talked to students and asked what helped transfer and what hindered transfer. One of the things they told us was that our course numbering system made no sense at all. This situation is not unique to Cerritos College but, sadly, is pervasive throughout the state. So the PET Task Force designed a rubric for a new "common sense" course numbering system. Courses numbered 0-49 will be developmental remedial courses; those numbered 50-99 are A.A. degree applicable courses, 100-199 freshman level courses, and 200-299 sophomore level courses. All of our departments are either in the process of or have completed the renumbering of their courses. We expect campus changeover within the next academic year.

Transfer Awareness Week

The PET Task Force has implemented a Transfer Awareness Week in October of each year. This is the time when students are beginning the transfer application

process. We run a major college fair with university representatives available for our students during one day of that week and a separate college fair on the evening of the same day for students from all of our local high schools. We run a series of workshops on transfer issues, including a panel discussion of former students who have successfully transferred, and we ask faculty to wear sweatshirts, t-shirts, neckties, caps—whatever they have—from the places where they went to school so as to stimulate discussion with students.

Special Articulation Agreements

We believe that it is our responsibility to inform students of university transfer opportunities beyond the UC and CSU system. We have, for example, articulation pacts with a number of historically Black institutions. These are new and we are developing informational literature about this program. Another example is our pact with Biola University, a fundamental Christian college. We know that over 50 Cerritos College transfer students are enrolled at Biola University.

Faculty Best Teaching Practices

I must tell you again that transfer begins with the faculty. They must encourage it, talk about it, make it real in the minds of students and they must prepare students for the rigor of university work. We want to know what they are doing in this regard and we want them to be able to tell their colleagues about it as

well. So, under the sponsorship of the PET Task Force, we are now in the third full year of offering a series of faculty led Best Teaching Practices workshops. Topics include everything from integrating technology in the classroom, to learning communities, to suggestions on how to build transfer preparation into any course. These workshops thrive and draw a substantial following. Most importantly they focus the faculty on the essential role which they play in the transfer process.

And speaking of new faculty, each finalist for a full-time teaching position is asked a question about their commitment to transfer. As an aside, I personally participate in the interview of the final two to four candidates for each new faculty position. I don't believe I have a more important responsibility than determining who will teach at Cerritos College for the next 20 to 30 years. So, this is the question: "Approximately 60% of the students who enroll at Cerritos College indicated that transfer to a university is their goal. What will you personally do to enhance the process of transfer for our students?" I consider this a critical question. The individual who has pondered this issue thoughtfully and has a thorough understanding of those faculty activities that impact transfer in a positive way will likely be the successful candidate.

Those are just some of the activities of the PET Task Force and new projects are being generated on a monthly basis. And we believe that all of this is starting to

make a meaningful difference. We do not have the best of data. It is difficult for our university colleagues to identify transfer students and where they came from and thus the data are perhaps not as solid as we would like. But here is what we know about transfer from Cerritos College. If we use 1994-1995, the year before PET began as a baseline, and then look at 1996-1997, the latest year for which data are available, when PET had been under way for about 18 months, we see an increase of 20% (94/113) in transfers to UC and 11% (652/724) in transfers to CSU from Cerritos College. And we have reason to believe, based on data from the Community College Chancellor's Office, that our transfer rate -- at least among one cohort followed from 1994 to 1997 -- has risen to about 19% up from about 13% prior to the start of the PET Project. I won't claim a cause and effect relationship and the numbers themselves are still too small, but clearly we are moving in the right direction. Additionally, we have no system of tracking students who transfer to private universities. We know that they do. In fact, four of the last six student trustees have transferred to private universities and graduated in two years.

But we've not stopped with PET. There are other efforts as well. Along with President James Rosser of Cal State LA, I was instrumental in convening what we call the Presidents' Summit on Transfer. This is a loose confederation of some ten community colleges, four CSU campuses and one UC, working together to make transfer among and between institutions genuinely seamless. We have

signed a statement of principles, enclosed as Appendix A, and we are working discipline by discipline to make transfer simple and efficient. CSU faculty meet to discuss major requirements, they then meet with their community college counterparts to work out articulation in the major. As this work is completed it is passed on to a general "working group" for approval and finally to a meeting of all the presidents. It is moving along, sometimes more slowly than we would like, but it is moving.

Perhaps most exciting of all is the agreement we are about to conclude with CSU, Long Beach, to train teachers. The project is called the Cerritos College Teacher TRaining ACademy (Teacher TRAC). This program will link the local school districts, Cerritos College, and CSULB in a seamless fashion to provide students with a clear pathway to a teaching credential. It is our goal that a junior, for example at Downey High School, may enroll as a Veysey student at Cerritos College and proceed through high school, through Cerritos College, and through CSULB toward a teaching credential in six years. In six years we hope to transfer a high school junior at Downey High School to a teacher in the Downey Unified School District. President Robert Maxson of CSULB and I are committed to this goal. Here's how it will work: We will admit students to a teacher training program. Their admission will include a letter from CSULB telling them that a place is waiting for them to finish their degree and credential in an expedited fashion when they finish their work at Cerritos College. While at

Cerritos College students will get pre-student teaching fieldwork experiences, complete the CBEST and their foreign language requirement. They will benefit from co-enrollment at CSULB and have CSULB academic advisors visit with them on our campus. They will also get special training in using the latest computer technology in the classroom (which will also be available at Cerritos College for native CSULB teacher education students). And they will be made to feel special and to understand that Cerritos College and CSULB think that teachers, teaching, and the preparation of teachers, is something very valuable and very special. I firmly believe that the Cerritos College Teacher TRaining ACademy (Teacher TRAC) will be a model teacher education partnership for the state, if not indeed for the nation.

As I probably have overstated, approximately 60% of our students desire to transfer. They say this is their goal – but few have the knowledge about how transfer works or what opportunities await them. For many, they are the first family member to express this desire. Consequently, there are no family members or friends who can explain how the process works and help shape their preparation for transfer. That important task is then left to the community college. Our students, for the most part, do not go on family trips to visit universities that they are considering. We recognize this, and recently the Cerritos College Foundation funded 20 high GPA students to visit Berkeley and

Stanford on a two-day trip. This is but a small example of the kind of special services, mentoring, and attention that our students need and deserve.

Finally, let me say a word about technology. I suspect that if it is not true already, it will be true very soon that college graduates will be expected to have a basic technological competency in the same way that they are expected to know how to write and how to do math. Our students transferring to the university will have that competence because we have provided them with a technology infrastructure that is unparalleled in the state. Each of our students has access to the nearly 600 computers in our new Learning Resource Center. And each of those machines is Internet connected and fully loaded with the very latest software. Whether it is doing research on-line, preparing a term paper, or exploring a university web site, our students are as comfortable with using computers as they are with writing an exam in a blue book. That gives them a competitive edge in getting to the university and a competitive edge once they get out and into the world or work.

Now, what can those of you who are involved with the shaping and making of public policy do to help facilitate transfer? Here are some things that I think that you can do:

1. **Help us to get better and more accurate data on where our transfer students are going and how they are doing, and help us to get that information in a timely fashion.**
2. **Help to set the stage and the parameters for a statewide, system-wide transfer AA degree.**
3. **Promote a statewide common sense and common course numbering system throughout the three systems.**
4. **Empower community colleges and most particularly community college faculty to prepare and certify students as ready for transfer. Our faculty know the content required for an introductory psychology course, an introductory accounting course, a lower division literature course, and the like. Our students are often hostages to the differing approaches that different universities take to these courses. If the course articulates successfully with one university, it may not to the next, because that university's faculty in a particular department have a different approach to the course. Let our faculty develop and teach the course and let that be sufficient for the course to be transferable. Our faculty are as qualified as any other to determine the content of those introductory**

courses and that ought to be good enough for the course to transfer. This should be a statewide policy.

5. **Similarly, any policy that promotes system wide agreements between the community colleges and the university systems would be of great benefit to students. We should not have to articulate course by course and university by university. There should be blanket agreements covering all the community colleges, the CSU and the UC.**
6. **Anything that could be done via public policy to expand, facilitate and ease dual enrollments and co-enrollments for students in community colleges and at the university would be a great benefit and encouragement.**

In closing, what I can say to you is that our efforts to promote transfer never stop and they don't even stand still for a moment. If I were to come back here in a year, I would tell you about more new activities and more initiatives. Beyond being a "pet project," improving transfer is our core mission and a social responsibility. Research shows that the baccalaureate degree is the dividing line in America. Our goal is to assure that as many of our students as possible are on the right side of that line.

My thanks for this opportunity to share some thoughts with you, and I would be happy to answer any questions that you might have.